SYNOPSIS

"Social Realism and Cultural Conflict in the Novels of Ngugi wa Thiong'o"

A SYNOPSIS SUBMITTED TO

PT. RAVISHANKAR SHUKLA UNIVERSITY RAIPUR (C.G.)

BY

INDRANEE BORKAR

FOR

THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

IN

ENGLISH

AUGUST, 2013

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1.Title of the Thesis-:

"Social Realism and Cultural Conflict in the Novels of Ngugi wa Thiong'o"

2. Introduction-:

Regarding literature, Africa produced some finest literary gems. Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiong'o is one of them. He is renowned Anglophone writer of Kenya. He is the bright star among the Kenyan writers. In 1964 he produced his first novel *"Weep Not, Child"*. It was the first published novel in English by an East African writer. Later he wrote some of very famous novels of Africa in English as *"The River Between"*(1965), *"A Grain of Wheat"*(1967), *"Petals of Blood"*(1977), *"Devil on the Cross"*(1982), *"Matigari"*(1986), *"Wizard of the Crow"*(2006). He is a well known and controversial playwright. *"The Black Hermit"* appeared in 1975. In 1977 his play *"Ngaahika Ndeenda"* was published in Gikuyu language, written in collaboration with Ngugi wa Mirii. It later appeared in English as *"I Will Marry When I Want"* in 1982. He was arrested by Kenyan government, because the play concerns with his unflinching plea for revolution in Kenya. He was imprisoned for almost one year. No formal charges were ever filed against him, but it is assumed that his involvement in a literary campaign aimed at raising the political consciousness of peasants and workers in his hometown led to his arrest. His imprisonment became a controversial matter and various African writers like Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe protested against it. Ngugi was called "Amnesty International Prisoner of Conscience". During these years he learnt about Gikuyu values and history and underwent the Gikuyu rite of passage ceremony. Later he rejected Christianity, and changed his original name in 1976, from James Ngugi, which he saw as a sign of colonialism to Ngugi wa Thiong'o in honour of his Gikuyu heritage. Unlike other African writers he decided to write in native Gikuyu language, despite the vogue of writing in English. This step established him as a bold artist of African culture. His fictions and non-fictions explore the detrimental effects of colonialism on Africa, especially on Kenya. Ngugi portrayed of the tragic predicament of the Kenyans who are torn by conflict between their cultural heritage and exploitative colonial context at both the individual and social levels. His disillusionment against imperialistic attitude of colonials and own countrymen strikes his readers again and again.

Later on Ngugi turned himself mostly towards prose writing. In year 1981 he produced *"Detained: A Writer's Prison Dairy",* which was the collection of his experience behind the bars. He worked as Chairperson in University of Nairobi but after his detention his plea to rejoin was rejected.

In year 1982 his first novel in Gikuyu published named *"Caithani Hultharaba Ini"* which was translated in English as *"Devil on the Cross".* It is a satire on the capitalistic view of local Kenyan elite who were exploiting Kenyan peasants and workers. Ngugi continued writing his political and cultural essays in England and America while his exile from Kenya because of his rebellious attitude towards the colonial and imperialistic mindset of government. Many times he was harassed by political powers. But he is a man of true courage who speaks his heart. In 1981 he wrote a collection of essay *"Writers in Politics*", it is a keen study of his social concerns. 1983 is the year of *"Barrel of Pen: Resistance to Repression in Neo-colonial Kenya"* which discusses about the contribution of some student leaders in struggle of independence. *"Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature"*(1986), is dedicated to those African writers who maintained the dignity of African tradition, culture and language. He believes that using a foreign language in literature in a mental colonialism for a country. In year 1993 he wrote *"Moving the Centre: The Struggle for Cultural Freedom".* In this collection of essays Ngugi urges to the colonized and exploited countries to move the central power of colonial nation through their rich tradition, culture and history. In *"Penpoints, Gunpoints and Dreams"*(1998), he displayed the relationship between art and political power in African societies. His memoir *"Dreams In A Time Of War"*(2010), is an autobiography, covering Ngugi's infant and childhood memories until the day he left home, as an adolescent primary school graduate, to join Alliance High School. It's a journey of Ngugi's childhood from a homestead shared with a father, four wives and numerous siblings to the start of a Western education. This represented a journey from the traditional to the modern. Another memoir *"In the House of Interpreter"*(2010), the author writes about his years at Alliance High School in Kenya. The writing is with interesting anecdotes and vignettes of Kenyan society, youth, and evangelism.

He has received many awards for his literary genius. He received the "The East Africa Novel Prize"(1962), "UNESCO First Prize"(1963), "Zora Neale Hurston-Paul Robenson"(1973), "Distinguished Afriacanist Award"(1996), "The Fanlon-Nicholas Prize"(1996) etc. He was also nominated for Booker Prize in year 2009.

Ngugi is a champion writer who thoroughly dedicated his works to Kenyan people and their sufferings. He depicted the realistic circumstance created by colonialism. Ngugi's candid efforts to present social reality and his concern for his country people can be seen in his works. This work is intended to discuss Ngugi's texts encapsulate his resistance of neocolonialism under the fine unraveling of fiction. This study focuses upon his Marxist point of view that gives every man an equal identity, socially, politically and economically. He believes that colonialism is a stinking

wound upon each colonized country and should be overcome with democratic values to everyone. His satire on suppression makes him a sincere artist and well wisher for those who are dominated and victimized.

3. A brief review of the work already done in the field-:

Ngugi's embarking presence in African and Commonwealth literature has been discussed widely in a number of critical studies. Ngugi's technique, narrative style, characterization, representation of society, his socio-political, cultural and historical concerns are presented. As much has been explored, the interesting part is exploration of the depth of the writings of this literary genius and find out the hidden grounds regarding his social concerns. It gives a wide scope to explore more about Ngugi and his writing skills and his command over social nerve of Kenya. His representation of exploitation is also remarkable. His works stand for criticism of imperialism and favour African mass against oppression by neo-colonial elite. This investigation represents Ngugi's efforts to inspire people of Africa to liberate themselves from the claws and shackles of imperialism and to reject the neo-colonialism.

4. Objectives-: The objectives of this study are-:

a). To explore Ngugi's point of view about history, literature, philosophy, religion, society, politics, language of Kenya and its exploitation by British.

b). To present the unequivocal criticism of colonialism by Ngugi through his fictions and non-fictions.

c). To display that how Ngugi voiced the silence of Kenyan people through his works which Ngugi attacked injustice and oppression and championed the cause of welfare of the poor and dispossessed in Kenya.

d). To foster, facilitate and enhance a comprehensive and critical study of the Kenyan circumstances about society and culture realistically, which is implemented to seek and to provide intensive knowledge about Kenya and its people.

e). To show how realism depicts and glorifies the struggle towards socialist progress. It portrays the reality of life, character and context. Ngugi does the same.

f). To understand and cogitate democratic and individual value in social and political level.

g). To know such a great realist and explore his motif to present his concern for native tradition and culture. It strikes mind with powerful flashes of changed mindset about colonialism and its horrid results.

5. Noteworthy contribution in the field of proposed work -:

The proposed work has no exclusive parallels in the criticism on Ngugi's fictions and non-fictions. However there are some works which are worthy to note on Ngugi wa Thiong'o by various research scholars and other authors. The proposed work will present Ngugi's concerns for society of Kenya and its reality as a victim of colonialism and neo-colonialism. This work showcases his labour to represent the real and actual condition of Kenya and its people. The following may be sustained as illustration-:

1). Ogude, James. *Ngugi's Novels and African History: Narrating the Nation*. London: Pluto Press, 1999. Print.

2). Padma, P. *The Novels of Ngugi: A Study in the Theme of Exploitation*. New Delhi: Prestige Books, 2007. Print.

3). Panduranga, Mala. *Ngugi wa Thiong'o: An Anthology of Recent Criticism*. New Delhi: Pencraft International, 2009. Print.

4). Sinha, Nandita. *Ngugi's and Mugo's "The Trial of Dedan Kimathi: A Reader's Companion*. London: Asia Book Club, 2004. Print.

5). William, Patrick. *Ngugi wa Thiong'o*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999. Print.

6. Proposed methodology-: (during the tenure of the research work)

MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, Seventh Edition.

7. Expected outcome of the proposed work-:

The main part of the method is a close study of the primary and secondary sources. The primary sources are the fictions non-fictions and plays of Ngugi wa Thiong'o. His writings will be analyzed in critical and psychological levels. The secondary sources include various books which are

critical studies of his works. Proposed work has an important aspect of African reality. It is appealing in the sense of social concerns. The drastic effects of colonialism and imperialism on African continent, annihilated the identity of its people, cultural heritage and most importantly their democratic values. Colonial slavery abolished innocence and generosity of Africans. Ngugi wa Thiong'o explores Kenya's myriad social and political problems and stresses the need for radical, fundamental reform. Ngugi also favors necessity of democratic values in life of an individual. It is a basic requirement for human beings. Giving someone a reason to cogitate the fundamental rights and identity as an individual is the primary purpose of this research work.

8. Bibliography in standard form-:

A useful bibliography of Ngugi's works and other critical works have been appended. The bibliography is divided in**:** Primary Sources, Secondary Sources and Web Sources.

9. List of published papers of the candidate-: 01

Chapter I – Introduction

Ngugi wa Thiong'o is currently a Distinguished Professor of the Departments of Comparative Literature and English at the University of California, Irvine. He is a teacher, novelist, essayist, and playwright, whose works function as an important link between the pioneers of African writing and the younger generation of postcolonial writers. He is one of Africa's best known and most widely discussed authors. As a spokesman for his people and a chronicler of Kenya's modern history, Ngugi is widely regarded as one of the most significant writers of East Africa.

In this chapter Ngugi's works would be discussed in the context of social reality. Ngugi as a well known Commonwealth writer has been represented. In his fictions and non-fictions he thoroughly comments about the ugly side of colonialism. He also depicted the post-independence situation of Kenya where the Africans are engaged in exploiting their own people along with the foreigners. This chapter concentrates on victimized condition of poor and common people. The basic themes of Ngugi's writing is to explore the reality of post-colonial life in Kenya. His novel *"Weep Not ,Child",* through young and sensitive Njoroge he revealed the exploitative nature of the White colonial education and its drastic effect on the minds of the young Kenyan children who were to grow into responsible Kenyan citizens. In *"The River Between",* Ngugi emphasizes on his interest in social realism. He shows that education is not mutually exclusive to the preservation of tradition and not all rituals are important to preserving tradition and culture. In *"A Grain of Wheat",* the reader discovers and informed about the atrocities of concentration camps and violence against the African people and eventually rebellion for freedom from the Whiteman's control. *"Petals of Blood",* deals with social and economic problems in East Africa after independence, particularly the continued exploitation of peasants and workers by foreign business interests and African elites. *"Matigari"* is a political novel in the form of a parable. In *"Devil on the Cross"* Ngugi clearly points out that women are exploited by black and white men alike in Kenya, he turns this concept of gender oppression into a metaphor for class oppression; any struggle for equality must ultimately be a struggle for class equality. The sexual exploitation of women becomes the metaphor for the seduction and rape of the people and country, which has occurred since the Mau-Mau insurgency. Magic realism drives *"Wizard of the Crow"* and this mammoth novel set in the imaginary African country of Aburiria, and exiled Kenyan writer Ngugi roots the wild fantasy in the brutal horror of contemporary politics. This dissertation presents that Ngugi's fiction has been noted for its overtly

political agenda, its attempts to give a literary voice to the poor of Kenya, and its consistent critique of colonialism and oppressive regimes.

This work intends to discuss about the collection of essays as *"Moving the Centre"* which underscore the importance of African culture in liberating the African people from the effects of imperialism and neocolonialism and the relationship between art and political power in African societies is examined in *"Writers in Politics"* and *"Penpoints, Gunpoints, and Dreams"*. Ngugi argues that art has to be engaged and active in order to check the excesses of the modern predatory African state. His *"Decolonizing the Mind"* additionally contains his pledge to write solely in Gikuyu, calling the collection his "farewell to the English language". Ngugi's nonfiction writing explores subject matter familiar to his novels, including the cultural and linguistic imperialism of the West, the loss of traditional African cultures, and the effect of Christianity on tribal communities. The essays in "*Homecoming: Essays on African and Caribbean Literature, Culture, and Politics"* emphasize the important social functions of African literature, while Ngugi's prison diary "*Detained*: *A Writer's Prison Dairy"* recounts the circumstances of his arrest and detention. His essays and critical works have been acclaimed as powerful and insightful explorations of relevant political, social, and literary issues in Africa. His attempt to explore reality and exploitation of Kenyan people is clearly dealt in this work.

Chapter II – Ngugi wa Thiong'o As an Avowed Socialist

This study is an analysis of the views of Ngugi about economic, political and social contradictions created by colonialism. Ngugi's works presents that how African economy is dependent on international capitalism and capitalism can never bring about equality of people. The exploitation of one group by another is the very essence of capitalism. The peasants and workers are very much exploited in Kenya because they get very low pay, very poor housing, and unemployment affects them more than anyone else. Women are doubly exploited and oppressed and this is clearly expressed in Ngugi's fictions and non-fictions. Besides his depiction of reality and exploitation he also urges for socialistic approach in society. Through his works he has shaken up the exploiting government and exploited people. Each and every detail about reality is striking.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o shows his concern and perspectives on Africa's march towards selfhood and independence via his novels and prose which represent an effort towards the liberation of Africa from imperialism and they deal with neo-colonialism in all its virulent manifestations. His works are political and they support the condemnation of bourgeois philosophy and practice, as manifested in international capitalism. He rejects neo-colonialism as a viable way of life for African people. Ngugi is an important voice in African letters. His early novels including "*The River Between",* "*A Grain of Wheat",* and "*Petals of Blood",*—act as "important documents in the history of postcolonial writing, distinguished by the urgency of their political engagement." His essays and critical works have been acclaimed as most relevant pieces of writing which describe colonial and imperial reality. Since he began writing in the 1960s, Ngugi has always resisted colonial labels and Christian doctrine. In 1976, he changed his name from James Ngugi to Ngugi wa Thiong'o. He stopped writing in English in 1981 after the publication of the highly acclaimed social critique, "*Decolonizing the Mind*", which he described as "my farewell to English as a vehicle for any of my writings". Six years later, his novel, *Matigari*, written in Gikuyu, was published. His latest offering, "*Wizard of the Crow*", has been variously described as "a masterpiece", "the crowning glory of his life" and "an epic farce" that pokes fun at the excesses and idiocies of dictatorships in Africa. He has also been influential in education in East Africa and is recognized as a humanist deeply interested in the growth and well-being of his people and country. Ngugi's fiction reflects his abiding concern for the poor of Kenya who have been displaced by white colonialists and by African opportunists who seized power after independence. Ngugi attacks the African tribal rite of female circumcision. He opposes the tradition, as well as Christianity's condemnation of the rite, believing that Christian missionaries only condemn the act because it acknowledges female sexuality. Through his works he always shows his sympathies

and concerns towards Kenyan people. Ngugi's literary targets have included governmental corruption, socio-economic exploitation, and religious hypocrisy. As a rebel writer, Ngugi has always upheld the view that it is the duty of an artist to provide moral direction and vision to the struggles of the exploited people. Ngugi in his fictional works delineates the exploitation of the Africans by the Whites and the consequential effect of such exploitation on the lives of the Africans. He vividly identifies three facets of encounter of the Africans with the European imperialists- slavery, colonialism and neocolonialism. His first three novels- *"Weep Not, Child"," The River Between"* and *"A Grain of Wheat"* deal with the period of slavery and colonialism. They explore the detrimental effects of colonialism and imperialism. On the other hand, *"Petals of Blood", "Devil on the Cross"* and *"Matigari"*, are about Ngugi's bitter criticism of neo-colonialism. In fact, there is also attack on slavery and colonialism. Ngugi's novel *"Wizard of the Crow"*, is his conscious effort to sum up Africa of the twentieth century. It dramatizes the corruption and power struggles between the dictator-state and the people. Ngugi displays his Marxism through his way of analyzing social facts, his rejection of capitalism, his siding with the popular masses in their struggle against the international bourgeoisie.

Chapter III – Cultural Conflict and Slavish Consciousness in the Novels of Ngugi wa Thiong'o

This chapter shows Ngugi's novels explore subject matter of the cultural and linguistic imperialism of the West, the loss of traditional African cultures, and the effect of Christianity on tribal communities and how he proposed social reforms thoroughly. The chapter is a discussion of the aspect of cultural conflict and slavish consciousness in Ngugi's novels. His novels present the conflict between Christianity and Kenyan traditional approach. "*The River Between*" had as its background the Mau-Mau Rebellion (1952-1956). The story was set in the late 1920s and 1930s and depicted an unhappy love affair in a rural community divided between Christian converts and non-Christians. The novel focuses on the conflict between Christian missionaries and the indigenous tribes. It also explores the long-lasting effects of colonialism and the consequences of struggling for independence. His novels are the true pictures of conflict with foreign culture and tradition. He rejects the slavish tendency to follow colonial traits as own. Instead of being blind follower of colonizing language and culture he forcefully speaks for own culture, tradition and language. *"Moving the Centre: The Struggle for Cultural Freedoms"* is a collection which examines such social and cultural issues as the importance of language to national identity, the effects of globalization, and Ngugi's hope for a strong and united Africa. Based on a series of lectures that Ngugi delivered at Oxford University in 1996, the essays in *Penpoints, Gunpoints, and Dreams: Toward a Critical Theory of the Arts and the State in Africa"* discuss the role of the writer in contemporary African society and the complex relationship between art and the state. Ngugi shows that colonialism denied Africa's right of cultural development and self expression and set up a state of siege.

Chapter IV – A Socio-historical Perspective in Ngugi wa Thiong'o

Ngugi wa Thiong'o, when he came to recreate the history of his people through fiction, selected for his first two novels *"Weep Not, Child"* and *"The River Between"* the events relating to the introduction of western education as well as Christianity. It contains the period of Kenyan history deeply connected with society. In the very beginning the novelist emerges as a true advocate of the cultural glory of Africa. Ngugi as a devoted Kenyan wants to emphasize that the colonial rule in Kenya destroyed the entire culture and social peace. It not only divided the society but also the inner beings of the Africans. As a sensitive artist Ngugi cries for the loss of African Culture and glory of the rich heritage. In *"A Grain of Wheat"*, Kenyan history from the pre-colonial to colonial and post-colonial eras have been described. The temporal focus of the novel is post-independence Kenya in the 1970s, and through his characters Ngugi explores how the fruits of "Uhuru" (freedom) have been unequally eaten, how the ideals of the national liberation are betrayed by the new ruling classes who align themselves with the exploitative ideologies of a transnational neocolonial bourgeoisie, and how those who actually fight for "Uhuru" are unrecognized in Kenyan history.

Ngugi's fiction confronts openly with the issue of the meaning and value of modern historical and socio-political experience in Kenya. His works help the reader determine if a novelist's portrayal of African society fully reflects its social relations, political arrangements, and economic factors. These critical writings also help in the debate on the definition of African literature. For they bring out the historical connections that make it possible to analyze African literature dealing with pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial phases of African history. The historical events of the 1970s revealed even more clearly the transition from colonialism to neocolonialism that had begun during the 1960s in Ngugi's fictions as in *"Devil on the Cross".* In *"Petals of Blood"* a cry for historical existence is uttered, for example, by Munira. Munira comes to Ilmorog because he is dissatisfied with his personal life. His father is a priest who preaches against the Mau-Mau, and his sister commits suicide because of her failed love affair with Karega. Feeling that life is absurd, he is driven to do something to give him a sense of belonging.

This chapter clarifies that Ngugi's belief upon the inseparable connectivity between society and history. It defines the development of a country. Ngugi draws upon the power of "narrating the past" to solve the crisis of exploitation and cultural lose. Modern African novel has become a historical document that projected the struggle for socio-cultural freedom.

Chapter V – Identity Crisis in the Novels of Ngugi wa Thiong'o

Identity, violation, religion, and culture find a forum for expression in post-colonial literature in Africa. In African novels the issue of identity crisis started with the idea having white complexion and being a Negro. Later novelists like Ngugi described this crisis in far most reality and style. Ngugi's characters, Waiyaki in *"The River Between"* and Njoroge in *"Weep Not Child",* are heroes who have harmony of character and action. They represent their people in face of socio-political turmoil towards total cultural as well as political emancipation from the colonial yoke. Ngugi's heroes stand for African Unity and Colonial rejection.

This chapter discusses characters in Ngugi's novels, whose fight for their individuality and identity. Africans have suffered most from other people's misguided attempts to 'modernize' them much of their literature in the twentieth century, has been inspired by a reappraisal of their own present place. Ngugi portrays the cultural and political awakening of the Kenyan people and their struggles to authenticate their selfhood and ethnic identity that was endangered by the colonial intrusion. Through the conceptualization of the woman Wariinga, "heroine of labour", Ngugi's radical sense of equality is demonstrated in his novel *"Devil on the Cross"*. In this novel Ngugi also depicted the lost identity of an African woman. In *"Petals of Blood"*, Munira realizes his lost condition as a social man. Abdulla too as Munira finds himself at the verge of lost identity when he sees the more ugly situation after independence, in comparison to the past. Wanja, is exploited and torn by colonization and lost her innocence in quest of her identity. Ngugi also presents the new Kenyan leaders as an aping group not only in their way of administration but mainly in their way of living. So, from the cultural point of view, most of the elite have lost their roots in order to espouse the western culture. A great deal of them has lost their African values but there are some who even though they have adopted western ways of life, manage to keep their African cultural values.

In this chapter cultural alienation will also be discussed. According to Ngugi newly independent Kenya, in the image of all the former colonies, is alienated, it has lost its roots by embracing those of the colonizers which exert on it a strong fascination. In his novel *"Matigari",* sense of lost identity appeals in every page. From the starting of this novel the central character Matigari, search for his home, family, children and his own position in society. Ngugi's concern for African mass reflects through his character and event portrayals. He urges for searching identity again and again. Identity crisis has described in Ngugi's novels is the collateral damage of colonization. Imperialism worked as erasure of indigenous people's cultural memory along with the renaming of

people, places, and objects to reflect the culture of the colonizer. European colonialism has left the continent fractured and searching for wholeness. It created identity crisis.

Chapter VI – Conclusion

This study explores Ngugi's approach towards social realism and the cultural conflict in his novels. Ngugi wa Thiong'o, a Kenyan writer of Gikuyu descent, began a very successful career writing in English before turning to work almost entirely in his native Gikuyu. In his 1986, "*Decolonizing the Mind*', his "farewell to English", Ngugi describes language as a way people have not only of describing the world, but of understanding themselves. For him, English in Africa is a "cultural bomb" that continues a process of erasing memories of pre-colonial cultures and history and as a way of installing the dominance of new, more insidious forms of colonialism.

Kenyan writer Ngugi has considered one of East Africa's most eminent literary figures. Since the early 1960s, Ngugi has produced a number of novels, plays, and critical essays, both in English and in Kenya's indigenous Gikuyu language, with a strongly political tone, for his emergence as a writer has also coincided with Kenya's struggle to free itself from the legacy of colonialism. Ngugi's literary targets have included governmental corruption, socioeconomic exploitation, and religious hypocrisy. This work depicts the social, political, historical and cultural attitude of Ngugi wa Thiong'o. His rebellious mindset towards colonial powers displayed through his writings. Acclaimed novelist and critic Ngugi traces the arc of Africa's fragmentation and restoration amidst the global history of colonialism and modernity. Seeking a revitalization of Africa, Ngugi argues that a renaissance of African languages is a necessary step in the restoration of African wholeness.

His each work is a representation of true picture of Africa. He has sympathetic view towards the people of Kenya. This work shows the all pervading capitalistic system and its dark side through characters and plots of Ngugi's works, especially his fiction works. Ngugi aims that the people of Kenya should speak out against the exploitation. Showcasing cultural and social conflicts in novels are its proof. Ngugi suggested the remedy for their wounds by his notions about anti-colonialism. He also says that total liberation can be achieved through the united efforts of the peasants, workers, students and scholars, in his novels. This is an effort to know the depth of his revolutionary thoughts and his democratic approach.

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